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ABSTRACT

A systematic way to create collaborative school improvement is provided. The currently expanding role of administrators as staff developers is explored; 10 strategies are listed for the principal to use as a key player in staff development. Two specific organization development problem-solving strategies, Situation-Target-Plan (S-T-P) and Force Field Analysis (FFA), are explained, and an overview of "action research" principles is provided. On the basis of these three domains (staff development, organization development, and action research), an integrated model for collaborative school improvement is proposed. This model can be used to enhance staff development, create a collaborative environment for shared decision making, and provide an avenue for ongoing self-evaluation leading to school improvement. A brief account of a successful project using this model to increase student achievement is included. (Author/EMK)

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Collaborative School Improvement: An Integrated Model for Educational Leaders

Eleanor A. Perry

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to provide educational leaders with a systematic way to create collaborative school improvement. Their role as staff developers is explored. Two specific organization development (OD) problem solving strategies: Situation-Target-Plan (S-T-P) and Force Field Analysis (FFA) are explained and an overview of action research principles is provided. On the basis of these three domains (staff development, OD, and action research), an integrated model for collaborative school improvement is suggested. A brief account of a successful project using this model to increase student achievement is included.

Administrators As Staff Developers

As the cry for increased school reform becomes deafening, local site administrators are becoming more involved with staff development. Rosie O'Brien Vojtek (1992, p. 1) wrote "current literature views staff developers as the critical link to organizational change. They are repeatedly being called to facilitate innovations which are designed to lead to effective school renewal and institutionalized school reform." Richard DuFour (1991) suggested that the principal should be the key player in effective staff development. He developed 10 strategies to help make that happen:

1. Create consensus on the school you are trying to become.
2. Identify, promote, and protect shared values.
3. Monitor the critical elements of the school improvement effort.
4. Ensure systematic collaboration throughout the school.
5. Encourage experimentation.
6. Model a commitment to professional growth.
7. Provide one-on-one staff development.
8. Provide purposeful staff development programs that are research based.
9. Promote individual and organizational self efficacy.
10. Stay the course. (DuFour, 1995, pp. 3-5)

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How does this new focus on staff growth differ from the past? Traditionally staff development simply meant teacher training. In Vojtek's (1992) study of 115 National Staff Development Council members whose primary responsibility was staff development, she found that most school districts were training only teachers or administrators. In those instances, staff development often referred to experts conducting one-day seminars on current educational issues, strategies, or instructional methods. Sometimes teachers became trainers-of-trainers by presenting a staff development session for their colleagues. Occasionally, support staff (custodians, clerks, secretaries, educational assistants) attended a mandatory training meeting to inform them of safety regulations or update them on specific procedures to enhance their job performance. Administrators rarely initiated professional and personal full-staff growth efforts.

What happens when administrators view staff development as an opportunity for all building personnel to grow together with the ultimate goal of improved student achievement? When school districts value staff development, administrators provide time and money to facilitate full-staff professional and personal growth. Especially now, with increased emphasis on collaboration and team building, educational leaders seek new ways to provide meaningful learning for their staffs.

Dennis Sparks (1994) stressed one way to connect student achievement and staff growth is to focus on organization development (OD) as well as individual development. When reflecting on the past 25 years of staff development he wrote, "It is now clear that success for all students depends upon both the learning of individual school employees ***and*** improvements in the capacity of the organization to solve problems and renew itself" (p. 27).

OD processes are valuable tools for staff developers who focus on school improvement. The strategies can (a) help a dysfunctional staff become a more cohesive team, (b) alter the norms of the group's culture, and (c) productively lead the organization through planned, systematic change. To better understand the process, I will first provide a brief historical background of organization development. Then I will explain two useful OD strategies.

Organization Development

In the 1960s, educators became interested in OD strategies that had been prevalent in the business arena since the 1940s (see Richard Schmuck & Eleanor Perry, 1994, for a detailed historical background of OD). Fullan, Miles, and Taylor (1980, p. 135) defined classical OD ineducation as

> "a coherent, systematically planned, sustained effort at system self-study and improvement, focusing explicitly on change in formal and informal procedures, processes, norms, or structures, and using concepts of behavioral science."

OD applications of the 1960s and 1970s began to move away from this classical design. They started to include "more eclectic and flexible interventions in which aspects of OD are being integrated into larger school improvement strategies" (Schmuck & Perry, 1994). As OD developed over the years,

educators paid more attention to communication skills, problem solving, decision making, and conflict resolution. Simply stated, the more contemporary goal of OD is to provide people with the tools needed to solve their own problems on a continuing basis. It follows then, that the aim of OD in schools is to help educators work collaboratively to change behaviors that ultimately would solve educational issues. Richard Schmuck and Philip Runkel (1994, p. 1) wrote that

> "schools and colleges are social organizations. Without human collaboration and commitment, they are only wood, concrete, and paper. Typically, educational improvement requires less change in the paper and more change in the patterns of human action."

One way to modify human behavior is to use an OD problem solving strategy called S-T-P. According to Schmuck and Runkel (1994), the S-T-P process has three parts. First, the group identifies an unsatisfactory present situation (S), second, they determine a more desirable goal or target, and third, they create a path (P) that removes (or at least shortens) the gap between the "S" and "T." One way to look at the overall S-T-P concept is like this:

1. Agree on the Situation. (Where are we now?)
2. Choose one Target. (Where do we want to be?)
3. Create a Path. (How do we get there?)

S-T-P is part of a six-step problem solving process:

1. Determine the current situation and desired target.	S and T
2. Brainstorm ways to reach the target.	P
3. Decide what forces will help or hinder your progress.	FFA
4. Develop an action plan.	Plan
5. Implement the plan.	Act
6. Evaluate your efforts and make adjustments as needed.	Adjust

The third step of the process, the force field analysis (FFA), is critical. Kurt Lewin, a social-psychologist who conducted human relations training in the 1940s, developed this concept. His workshops focused on how people could make their groups more effective by looking at how they personally interacted on a social basis. This internal, self-diagnosis was very different from Taylor's popular scientific method. Lewin believed you must look beyond the simple tasks at hand to solve work-related problems. He argued that the scientific method must include social-psychological concepts. Marvin Weisbord (1990, p. 97) described Lewin's force field analysis as follows:

> Every unsolved problem represents forces pushing for and against resolution. Easier and effective solutions come by reducing restraints rather than adding pressure. . . . Force field analysis quickly identifies restraints to be reduced. It is effective as a group exercise because it helps people see all at once what can be done, and builds group support for follow-through.

Force field analysis (FFA) involves four steps:

1. Pick one high priority target.
2. Brainstorm all forces that might help or hinder reaching the targeted goal.
3. Choose up to six forces that might hinder your progress the most.
4. Prioritize the six forces.

The first step of the FFA can be the most difficult. Group members often have strong feelings about what is most important. The educational leader must stress the need for group consensus and assure members that no identified ideas will be lost in the process.

In Step 2, the group lists forces that might enhance their journey toward, or deter them from reaching targeted goals. There is no discussion during this exercise other than asking clarifying questions. Individual forces might include people's feelings and attitudes toward the target. Group forces might focus on norms, roles, and procedures. A larger sphere of social forces might point to the community's climate toward change. Finally, the force field analysis might include helping and hindering forces at the macro-political level of state and national influences.

In the third step, the group chooses six forces that might hinder progress the most. Again, people's individual feelings and concerns might interfere with the overall scope of the planned, systematic change process. To be successful, all participants must respect the decision of the group. Individuals might not fully agree on the forces chosen, but they must be willing to support the effort by not impeding the team's progress.

In the final step of the FFA process, the group prioritizes the new shorter list of hindering forces based on how feasible it is to remove each force. Then they develop a plan of action. This plan includes multiple suggestions for how to remove the identified, prioritized hindering forces. The plan also details who is responsible for each specific task within a given timeline. The team monitors progress on a regular basis and makes further change based on the results of a self-evaluation. Once group members become comfortable with the S-T-P and FFA strategies, they can apply those problem solving techniques as the foundation for an action research project.

Action Research

Action research has been around in one shape or another for over fifty years. Its earliest beginnings came when a group of government agents looked to the farmers, themselves, to help solve agricultural problems. Kurt Lewin and his student, Ronald Lippitt, expanded this notion. They believed that "social problems should be served by social inquiry" (Emily Calhoun, 1994, p. 16). As such, they moved action research out of the agricultural fields and applied it to social psychology. In the early 1950s, Stephen Corey applied Lewin's work to the field of education.

Corey's thesis, according to Calhoun, was that

> "school practitioners would make better decisions and implement more effective practices if they conducted research as part of their decision-making process and used the results of such research as a guide to selection or modification of their practice" (p. 17).

Today teachers are becoming involved in studying their own profession instead of being studied by outside experts (Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Susan Lytle, 1993). Twenty-first century educational leaders, too, must find practical ways to investigate issues and implement solutions. Action research is one way to meet that need.

Unlike traditional research that simply reports findings, the purpose of action research is to improve education. It is a hands-on study conducted by people who have a burning desire to create change in their profession. James Keefe and John Jenkins (1997) suggest that action research "acknowledges that theory and practice go hand-in-hand, and that practitioners are capable of reflecting critically upon what they do with the aim of improving it." The five steps of action research are:

(1) State the problem,
(2) Collect the data,
(3) Analyze the data,
(4) Report the results, and
(5) Design an action plan.

In the first step, the group identifies key issues. Then they collect data in a variety of ways from within their surroundings. For instance, existing school records or students' work collected in portfolios provide value sources of data. Next, the researchers analyze the data by identifying main themes and sorting the data into logical supportive evidence matrixes. Then they use that information to prepare a report for formal and informal presentations. Finally, the action researchers develop a plan for implementation of what they learned during their investigation for the purpose of school and classroom improvement (Richard Sagor, 1992). The five steps of action research, indeed, provide an ideal way to pull together staff and organization development. It is on that notion that I suggest the following integrated model for collaborative school improvement.

An Integrated Model

Creating planned, systematic change is like taking a trip. OD strategies such as S-T-P and FFA help you get ready for the trip by providing specific steps for becoming a community of self-sustained problem solvers. Staff development serves as the vehicle that helps you travel down the road to change, while action research carries you successfully to your new destination—a self-renewing organization whose main focus is improved student learning.

Perry's Collaborative School Improvement Model

Action research, augmented by the OD S-T-P and FFA strategies, fits nicely into staff development sessions. The design would look like this. First, the staff states the problem using S-T-P and FFA strategies. Second, teams collect and analyze data pertinent to solving their agreed-upon problem. Next, they report their findings to the whole staff who then design a plan for putting action into their research. Finally, they implement the action plan and evaluate it at regular intervals.

One might think of this integrated model as a building project. OD represents the hands-on tools and action research represents the blueprints. The instructional leader uses the tools and blueprints to facilitate the construction of the *schoolhouse of change*. That schoolhouse is builtduring staff development sessions by a dedicated team of specialists, the teachers and staff. Each person on the team brings specific strengths to the project. With a strong foundation in all three disciplines (staff development, OD, and action research), the chance of successfully constructing an environment for increased student learning is greatly enhanced. That is what happened in a school where the staff applied this integrated model.

Applying the Model

This study took place in an economically-depressed rural school in Southern Oregon where I was principal. There were only six schools in the

entire state with a lower socio-economic status. The school housed 150 students (5-11 years old) and 23 district employees. Eighty-four percent of the students received free or reduced lunches. There was an 86% annual student transient rate and a high teacher turnover. Standardized test scores were historically low.

District officials allowed one hour each week for teachers' staff development meetings. Early in the school year, teachers decided they wanted to investigate two issues. First, they wanted to determine if a connection existed between the students' socio-economic status and their low test results. Second, they wanted to learn how data collection and reporting might help them better understand the problems at their school. They collectively agreed to rearrange their schedules so that all support personnel could attend the staff development meetings too. The teachers believed there were serious problems in their school. They felt solutions should come from *all* people who touched the children's lives on a daily basis.

At subsequent staff development meetings, I used my background in staff and organization development to guide the faculty and staff through the S-T-P and FFA strategies. They identified their current situation (S), designated a desired target (T), and created a path (P) to narrow the gap between the "S" and "T."

After much discussion, they agreed to focus solely on increasing student achievement in reading. They believed this was the most critical, immediate issue they faced. S-T-P helped them collaboratively reach that consensus. Then I introduced the concept of force field analysis. FFA results identified three major hindering forces:

(1) lack of teaching materials,
(2) lack of school focus, and
(3) lack of flexibility in grouping students.

The staff devoted the remaining sessions to removing thosehindering forces by initiating an action research project. Teams collected student data and current research on improving student reading in high poverty communities. They reported back to the full staff at the regularly scheduled staff development meetings. Then they developed their action plan. They used their data to pursue federal grant moneys for additional resources and staff training in reading strategies for children of poverty. They also devised strategies for sharing their current teaching materials and worked on creative ways to meet the children's needs through alternative grouping plans.

As their plan grew, they also grew professionally and personally. The integrated model helped them become a cohesive team focused on common goals. It also provided an opportunity to alter their norms of isolationism. Teachers and staff indicated a special bonding within their small groups as they shared common feelings and concerns. At the individual level, one person wrote, "I learned the importance of sharing philosophies and ideas–I learn more about *me* every time we share."

Educational Implications

This paper describes a school improvement model that integrates an advanced form of staff development, OD strategies, and action research methodology. It shows how a principal assumed the role of key staff developer and applies the integrated model in a high poverty school. Instructional leaders can learn from this example. They can use this model to (a) enhance staff development in their schools, (b) create a collaborative environment for shared decision making, and (c) provide an avenue for on-going self-evaluation leading to school improvement.

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